

So if you are with us for the first time or if you've been away and this is your first time in worship in the month of July, let me explain what we're doing. We are not in the Book of Acts. We will return to the Book of Acts in September, but for the months of July and August we're going to be looking at the biblical doctrines of heaven and hell. We as a church are centered on the gospel of Jesus Christ and the central message that Jesus was sent by his Father in heaven to bring redemption and rescue and salvation to those whom he draws to himself, those who would believe by grace through faith, enabled by the Spirit to grasp who Jesus is. But what is the eternal end of the work of Christ? What is heaven? What is hell? So we're looking at these key doctrines as they are biblically taught. So this is, if you will, a topical series for the months of July and August.

I want to say to you this morning I'm going to be doing something a little different than is typical practice for Pastor Tim or me. Typically what we would do is we would be preaching from one text. We read that text and then we preach from it. But this morning I'm going to be reading through a series of texts, and I'll only be reading through them as I get to the points that you'll see in your outline. They are outlined there for you. I'll be reading those passages as we get to them.

So let me begin, then, with reminding you where we've been. Last week we began with looking at the biblical doctrine of the intermediate state. And that is, until Christ comes again, as the Bible clearly teaches us---we will hear again this morning---that when Christ comes again there will be a resurrection. And that resurrection will then lead to eternal life, in either heaven or hell. But the nature of heaven is clearly taught in the Scriptures most principally, or at least in greater length, in Revelation 21 and the opening portions of Revelation 22, in what is called the new heavens and the new earth. We will spend the final two Sundays in July looking at the new heavens and the new earth.

But until Christ returns, what happens to those who die, those who are believers and those who are not. We looked at that, and that is called the intermediate state. We looked at that last week when the thief on the cross---or the criminals that were with Jesus. One of the criminals rejected Christ, and the other said to Jesus, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' And his pronouncement on that criminal was: "Today you will be with me in Paradise." We expanded on the reality that though the body of that criminal went to the grave and would see decay, his soul---spirit---went to be with the Lord immediately that day and remains with him. And those who do not believe, as we will look at greater length in August, that those who do not believe, the souls of those who have passed and did not know Christ, will go to eternal hell and judgment. But it is an intermediate stage, in that their souls are with the Lord until the last day, the day of resurrection, when Christ will come and the dead in the graves will be raised.

And what will be the nature of those bodies? That is what we're looking at this morning. So will you pray with me this morning as we begin this important---and absolutely vital to the life of the church---study of his Word. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, through the majesty, the power, and the victory of Christ, we come to you this morning. We come to you because your Son is seated at your right hand and to him you have given all authority in heaven and on earth. He is the Lord. You, Lord Jesus, sent your Holy Spirit as you instructed your disciples---that when you ascended you would send forth your Holy Spirit not only to them, but to all who believe, those who belong to you. And so we would pray, in the name of Christ and the power of his glory and authority, that by the presence and power of your Spirit you would work mightily through your Word this morning to give us a greater understanding, and a greater hope of the resurrection of our bodies, and what that therefore means for our life now in the between times between Christ's ascension and his returning again in glory. Help us, oh Lord, by your Word and Spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen.

So I was listening to an interview this past week done by one of the producers of National Public

Radio---stories called *This American Life*. He was writing about something which may be familiar to you. It was written this way. He said there are many of us who are carting around with us as adults childhood beliefs that come to an end in the most embarrassing of ways. Some of these childhood beliefs were because of what we were told. Other times it was because of a simple misunderstanding of language, of how something was pronounced. This is one of those stories.

Her name is Jodie Mace. She said when I was a kid I would see school crossing signs and there was the picture of the little kids walking and it would say 'School Xing.' And I thought that 'Xing' was an actual word, and I pronounced it 'zing.' When I was in my twenties and I was walking into work, about ten geese walked in front of me on the sidewalk. I turned to one of my coworkers and casually said, 'It looks like they should have a Zing sign for the geese. There was sort of a long and awkward silence. And I thought that he was thinking you know, that's actually a pretty good idea. But instead he finally broke the silence and looked at me and said, you know 'zing' isn't a word, don't you?

That happened to me. Yes. I believe somewhere in my mid to late twenties, while in our bedroom I said to Kate: Kate, could you get something for me in the Chester drawers? And she said, 'In the what?' And I said, 'Could you get that for me in the Chester drawers?' And she said, 'Do you mean the chest of drawers?' And I said, 'What?' And so there began the deconstruction of many years as a Southerner, when my mother would say to me, 'Randy, put your stuff in your Chester drawers,' and I thought that the Chester drawers was named after Chester, who must have designed this brilliant piece of furniture.

And what became an adulthood embarrassment is what is so common to many of us, is it not? That somewhere along the line, either through mispronunciation or stories that you were told that no one cared to correct that they were clearly joking about, but what you clearly thought was serious---you grow up and you carry around with you beliefs around which you orient your life. I thought until I was twelve my belly button was where the Yankees shot me. Go ahead and laugh! But if you think I did not reorient my life around that truth until age twelve, you're kidding yourself. It's true, I promise you. Clearly my parents were trying to skip the story of the birds and the bees and just went straight to: Yes, the Yankees were our enemies. It is any wonder that I feel far more at home up north than I ever did down south.

But how many of us are walking around with an idea of the resurrection that has more to do with myth and not biblical truth. And when our lives are oriented around myths or errors about the Scriptures, it can radically affect the way we orient our lives. That is why we're going through these important doctrines. And this morning I say, there has been so much error around the nature of our resurrected bodies, that it has led to---from the earliest moments of the New Testament church---error in the way we live now. So let's look together, that God might reorient our misunderstanding. Perhaps it's a 'mispronunciation.' Perhaps it's deeper. Perhaps you were told in seriousness the nature of our resurrected bodies and what they would be like, and maybe you don't know how that's affected the way you live now.

So let's look together. You'll see in your outline we're going to look first, quickly, at what Jesus and Paul taught about resurrected bodies. They did so in a summary fashion. And then we're going to look at the most expansive teaching on the nature of the resurrected bodies, through Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, in chapter fifteen.

Let's first hear the teaching of Jesus. Remember what I've said earlier, and I want to say again. As Jesus was responding to his critics---those critics were the Jewish leaders---you need to remember that the Jewish leaders had various beliefs regarding resurrection. There were largely three groups of Jewish leaders. The Essenes, who were given to an aesthetic lifestyle, in that they were drawing themselves away from culture and living a more strict adherence to the law outside of community. But

it was also the Pharisees, which are perhaps most familiar to many of you if you've ever read the New Testament. The Pharisees believed in a literal resurrection, but they believed in a resurrection at the end of the world, at the end of the age, if you will. But there was another large group of Jewish leaders, the Sadducees, who did not believe in any resurrection at all. And the Sadducees would often confront Jesus, and interestingly, Jesus would teach something that the Pharisees agreed with. But of course, ultimately they would disagree with the fact that Jesus would speak of his own resurrection.

This is the context in which you first hear Jesus speaking in John Chapter 5. We're going to look first at John 5:28-29. You can see the passage before you on the screens. "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice (the voice of the Father) and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment." Now it's very clear, in the most simple of verses, that Jesus unpacks with little explanation at all the nature of what he is teaching. He's saying on that day tombs will open and dead bodies that are lying in the graves will come out of those graves. And when they do, they will come into judgment. That judgment will either lead to life everlasting, or it will lead to a resurrection of eternal judgment.

But again, Jesus is not talking in metaphor here. He is not talking in parable yet. Jesus would not talk in parable until his teaching was accused of being that of Satan. And Jesus said okay, I will now speak in a way that you're going to find very hard to understand. But Jesus is not talking in parable here in the gospel of John. He's talking quite literally. That those who are in the tombs will hear his voice and they will come and they will be judged. Those who have done good will lead to the resurrection of life. You see what he's teaching there.

Now we know, as we will get to later in the fall, of Paul's own conversion. That conversion happened because Jesus Christ, the risen Lord---as he had appeared to the disciples who became the apostles---he also appeared to Paul. And that conversion would then lead Paul to be the writer of much of the New Testament, and he would write about the nature of the resurrection. The passage in Romans Chapter 8 is often not remembered by many. Many remember 1 Corinthians 15, but let's look at two brief passages that Paul taught, as he learned from Jesus and the other apostles, regarding the resurrection.

Romans 8:9-11. This is that great chapter that those who are in Christ are no longer condemned and they live Spirit-empowered lives. And this is what he writes regarding the resurrection: "You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you." I'll come back to that briefly.

Look now at Philippians 3:20-21. He is saying the implication of belonging to Jesus, the implication of being filled by the gift of God's Spirit, he says: "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." Amen? I mean, just reading that preaches itself.

But let's go back, if you will, to Romans 8. Notice he is saying that the litmus test for belonging to Christ is to determine the Spirit's presence in your life. How do we do that? We do that by understanding are the fruit of the Spirit present in my life? And that is not just a self-evaluation, it is done living in community with other believers. And that fruit, Lord willing, by the Spirit's work, is working its way out in our thoughts, our words, our actions. But here he is saying that Christ is in you-

--verse 10---although the body is dead because of sin. So what is he meaning there? This is Paul's quick summary of what he would expand on in 1 Corinthians 15. It is important to remember to hold these things in comparison.

Adam and Eve were created by God in God's power to reflect his glory. They were created man and woman by the word of his power from the dust, and they were given en-fleshed and en-boned bodies--*soma*. So prior to the fall, Adam and Eve had glorious, perfect, righteous, but also real bodies. But because of their decision to go against the commandments of God, sin entered the world through the temptation, and that temptation was given to Adam and Eve. They drank it up, if you will, and they disobeyed God. Therefore sin entered the world and their bodies, their physical bodies, as a result of sinning, would then be judged and their bodies would then begin decaying. Therefore every human being since Adam and Eve, our first parents, have been given to decay. So when Paul says: 'although the body is dead because of sin,' it means because of our sinful natures our bodies are as good as dead, meaning they are mortal.

But notice where the problem is, and this is in there and inferred, which we will get to at greater length. Notice the problem is not the fact that our bodies are real. It's the problem of sin that has affected our bodies and the judgment on sin. Do you see how you can compare? So for Paul that body---these bodies that we have with us---are sown perishable. They are sown in sin, meaning we have mortal bodies affected by the sinful nature. But they will be raised spiritually by the Spirit, the power of the one who raised Christ from the dead. And what does it say? He says that the Spirit is life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

So the teaching that Paul is giving to us in short form here is that on that day when Christ returns and the dead, according to Christ, will come out of the tombs, they will be united to their spirits that are now either with the Lord or in judgment. And on that judgment day, united with our bodies, we will stand in judgment---the final judgment. But it will be with bodies. And the Spirit will indwell us. And if you are a believer, that body, united now to your spirit, raised from the tomb, will be a resurrected body and will be with him forever in the new heavens and the new earth, as we will get to in the next two weeks. Not in floating up in the heavens somewhere. The new heavens and the new earth, you see. There will be a restoration, not just of our bodies by Christ's power and by his Spirit, but there will be the restoration of the heavens and the earth, you see.

So for Jesus and for Paul---before we even get to the most expansive teaching on the resurrection in all of Scripture---what we find is the principal problem is the sin nature and God's righteous and just punishment of our sin. The problem isn't first and foremost that he created us with flesh and blood and bone, you see. The problem is sin, and that sin has corrupted our bodies and our bodies are dying. But on that day when Christ comes again, there will be new life.

So let's look at together, then, the nature of resurrected bodies, according to the teaching of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. Recognizing there is a lot here, so let's go through it together. Verses 12-20.

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ

has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

So it is clear, as you will see in the outline, that for Paul, the resurrection of Christ's body from the tomb, and therefore the teaching of the resurrection of our bodies---of those who believe---is absolutely indispensable to the Christian faith. Without it, the Christian faith comes apart. It is something we must remember. That indeed, it is easy for us to either over-emphasize the continuity of the bodies we have now with the bodies that will be post-resurrection, or we see only discontinuity between the bodies now and the body that will be. So oftentimes we either fall off on one side or the other. We either over-emphasize continuity or we over-emphasize discontinuity. But the reality is when we do so, we diminish the reality that Paul is saying, that if Christ was not raised, then no one will be raised. It is absolutely indispensable to your Christian faith what you believe regarding this important truth, according to Paul.

But he then lays out in verses 14-19 the foundation upon which we are to understand the resurrection of our bodies at the last day. In verses 14-19 he teaches regarding Jesus Christ and his resurrection. He says in verse 15: We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. So he's saying that Christ has been raised, so that our faith has a foundation. There's a model upon which our future resurrection is built, and that foundation is Christ.

But what of Christ's resurrection? Here I turn to the Confession of our church, corporately. And our church has as its confession of faith, the Westminster Confession of Faith and what it calls a Larger and Shorter Catechism. These are a series of question and answers used for the training of the body. This is what it says in the Larger Catechism about Jesus' resurrection. It says: "Christ was exalted in his resurrection, in that, not having seen the corruption in death, (of which it was not possible for him to be held,) and having the very same body in which he suffered, with the essential properties thereof, (but without mortality, and other common infirmities belonging to this life,) really united to his soul, he rose again from the dead the third day by his own power; whereby he declared himself to be the Son of God, to have satisfied divine justice, to have vanquished death, and him that had the power of it, and to be Lord of the living and the dead: all which he did as a public person, the head of his church, for their justification, their growth in grace, support against enemies, and to assure them of their resurrection from the dead at the last day."

So it's saying what we can only infer and know from the testimonies of those who witnessed the resurrected Jesus. It is true that Jesus had the ability to go through closed doors, so we know that his resurrected body was clearly something of a greater power and a greater glory. And yet he was recognized as Jesus. We know that at least the body which he was raised with had flesh and bone. We know that he participated in meals. We know that he was recognizable at a distance, but he could also veil his identity. That is the glory and the power of Christ.

But notice as well, indeed, as Jesus teaches his disciples who are doubting in Luke 24, when he says they were startled and frightened. He had just appeared to them. They were startled and frightened---of course, who wouldn't be. And he says---this is absolutely key---they were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. Now watch, right. A ghost is a phantom or a spirit of something which was formally living. They certainly thought that was possible. There are many, perhaps even here this morning, who believe such a thing and who think about the resurrected body as if it were a ghost. So this is a key question, a key issue. So as they were thinking and were frightened because they thought they saw a ghost, then Jesus says: Why are you troubled? Why do doubts arise in your mind? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I, myself. Touch me and see. A ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.

So clearly the body which was raised in power and victory over death, that is, Christ's body, had flesh and bone, but it was not completely in continuity with the body that we saw prior to his death. He wasn't walking in and through doors that were closed. There's something glorious about his body, but it was still a body, you see. That is our foundation, so hold onto that idea.

So then we find something interesting in verse 20. He says: But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Now I've put there: Soul sleep?...with a question mark. The reason for that is because there are denominations in our day that teach that when you die prior to Christ's return, souls go into a state of unconscious sleep. One of those denominations is prevalent in our region: Seventh-day Adventist. With all due respect and honor to those in that denomination, I want to say though they try to find isolated passages from which they take their doctrine of soul sleep, I tell you, the Bible does not teach soul sleep. The reason for that is because when the Bible uses the word 'asleep' that was first century Greek and Hebrew understanding of what happened to physical bodies when they go to the grave. It was not speaking of the soul that goes to be with the Lord or goes into eternal judgment. It's talking of the body, not of the soul. And they use 1 Corinthians 15 to ground that, and they use these very words: those who have fallen asleep. It's talking about those who have died, not their souls, you see. It's important as you will see in just a moment. So, dealing with soul sleep.

Now let's look at the nature, then. Okay, so if our bodies are going to be raised according to the foundation that has been laid in Christ, what will they be? Well, Paul teaches this in 1 Corinthians 15:50-58.

I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

'Death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?'

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Paul is teaching here, by way of comparison, the bodies that we have now and the bodies that will be of those who are raised from their graves. And he uses the language of perishable and imperishable. And I use here corruptible and incorruptible, because it is easier to say. (I'm just checking to see if you're still awake.) Corruptible. As I said earlier---and I'll say it again briefly---Adam and Eve, prior to the fall, had flesh, bones and blood, but they were not corrupt until they chose to disobey God. And at that moment, all flesh was corrupted by sin. And the judgment for sin was being kicked out of God's presence from the Garden of Eden and the pronouncement of death, that all flesh will see decay.

And so we must be reminded that when Paul says here that indeed 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable,' what Paul is saying there.... And I want to say to you, there will be some who will find this hard to hear, but again, I would just ask you to go and to read the authorities and the many commentaries and the studies of the Greek language and the study of Paul---I would ask you to test what I'm about to say. But it is very clear that when Paul says that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, what he's talking about is this flesh

and blood, which is corrupt because of sin. He's not saying that the bodies that we will have in their resurrected state will not have flesh and bone. Because that's what Jesus has, that's what he said.

That isn't to say, however, that the bodies that we will receive, will not then be incorruptible, because they will be raised and sown by the Spirit, which is what Paul referred to in Romans 8. They will be raised imperishable, because although this body was sown through the sinful nature, that body will be raised from the dead and sown through the Spirit. Do you see the difference? One is from below. The other is from heaven. The other is by the act and power of God breathing new life into resurrected bodies. So this is corruptible. That will be incorruptible. That is Paul's point. We will have bodies. Real bodies, as we do now, but without corruption, decay, weakness, sickness.

But there is also discontinuity. They will be glorified bodies. I don't know what they will look like. But according to the Scriptures, if Jesus was recognizable as Jesus, I will be recognizable as Randy Lovelace---but praise be to God, not in this form! Not a body that is given to sin, death, decay, and sickness.

Joni Eareckson Tada wrote these words about her paralysis, as she looked forward to that new day. In her book on heaven she writes: Somewhere in my broken, paralyzed body is the seed of what I shall become. The paralysis makes what I am to become all the more grand when you contrast atrophied, useless legs against the splendourous, resurrected legs. I'm convinced that if there are mirrors in heaven---and why not?---the image I'll see will be unmistakably Joni, although a much better, brighter Joni." Our bodies now are corrupted because of the sinful nature, the judgment of the law, and the death that comes by way of that judgment. But in Christ---in Christ, believing in what he has done, believing in the redemption of Christ and his death on the cross to take our sin upon himself---to love us, despite our being an enemy of his because of our nature---Christ redeems those by faith, and it is by grace. And those who believe in him will receive incorruptible bodies that will not see sickness. There will be no graves, there will be no weakness. Our bodies will be built on the pattern of the glorious body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that is exactly the point of verses 56 and 57. The victory. He says---verse 54---"When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' He's pointing to the fulfillment of that promise, of that Old Testament statement, that Christ in his death on the cross removes---as one commentator says---the stinger from our flesh, because he took sin on himself, though he was not guilty of any sin. He took our sin, and in so doing, he took the stinger from our flesh, which is sin. And he paid the price of the just punishment of death on himself. Therefore in that day, death will have no power. Death will have no sting. Because sin has been paid for, death has been vanquished. And him who holds death in his hands---which is Satan---has been crushed by the mighty power of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the victory.

And so he says: "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Gordon Fee, a great New Testament commentator, says we do not merely live out the length of our days and then have the hope of the resurrection as an addendum at the end. Rather, as Paul makes plain in this passage, Christ's resurrection has set in motion a chain of inexorable events that absolutely determines our present and our future. Christ's death on the cross for our sin and taking the punishment of death that was due to us on himself has set in motion an inexorable chain of events that affects our life now. For we can know in the present the salvation of Jesus Christ our Lord and King, but that will also lead to the inexorable consequences of that victory of his resurrection, which will mean a victory for us who believe in ours. That is the hope of the resurrection.

And why do I say, as you see in the application, the 'Therefore.' It is because Paul writes about a

future hope in a present tense in the verbs. Meaning the future hope---Jesus Christ and his resurrection and the hope we have of ours in the future---has broken into history, into the present. Which means when Paul says: "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord"---meaning our future resurrection has implications for how we live now.

I'm looking at my clock. I started late, so stick with me. You're not going anywhere until I get this point. This is why it matters how we treat our bodies and what we do with our bodies. So here I want to speak to those who believe. If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, according to the Scriptures, according to the authority of Christ you have received the presence of the living God by his Spirit, and you are united with your Lord Jesus. And Jesus as Lord and King has not been called to be your assistant. He's called to be your Lord. And so, therefore, when we do with our bodies what we do, we must do so mindful of the fact that what we sow now in these bodies has implications for what will happen then. Which is why when we unite our bodies sinfully with things that are not of the Lord, be they sexual ethics or practices of violence---all with our words, our hands, our feet, our hearts, our motivations and drives---when we unite those things to that which does not please the Lord, it has implications for these bodies now and it has implications for the judgment that is to come.

This is why Paul says to a group of Corinthians who were doubting the reality of the resurrection.... And guess what it was doing in their midst? It was leading many of them to sexual amorality. It was leading many of them to mistreat others. It was leading them to pride. Because it didn't matter, they thought, how they treated their bodies. They thought they had arrived spiritually. The body was of a lower order. Paul says absolutely not. If Christ was not raised, then we won't be raised. You bet we'll be resurrected. And so he says therefore, be immovable.

So the first thing I would say to you as a part of the 'therefore' is that we are talking about nothing other than the power of the living Lord and King, Jesus Christ, who is coming again. And it is his power of his kingdom which will raise our bodies from the dead and unite them to our souls, and we will stand in judgment. Do you believe in this Lord? Or do you simply see him as one who gives you forgiveness of sins, but he's not the Lord of your life?

Today after the service we're going to go to a picnic across the street. As you go to the picnic across the street---if you're able to join us---I ask you to look at this piece of paper. I borrow this illustration from a woman named Barbara Boyd, who is a long-time teacher at Intervarsity Press. The distance between the earth and the sun is 92 million miles. If that were represented by this piece of paper, then the diameter of our galaxy would represent a 310 mile high stack of papers. If the distance between the earth and the sun is a speck in relationship to our entire galaxy, and our galaxy is a speck in the weight of all of the universe, and if the Scriptures teach---as they do---that Jesus holds all things together by the word of his power, then is Jesus not more than our Savior and our assistant for an already well-lived life? He is the Lord of glory. And that Lord is coming to make these corruptible bodies into incorruptible, glorious vessels of immortality.

My friends, I ask you to pray for me as I've prayed for you in these great truths. You bet it makes a difference in how we live. And I scarcely say, with such heavy eternal truths I find myself humbled to the ground. As I prayed this morning, Lord, have mercy for the shortsightedness of my theology, of the shallowness of my days and my perspective. For we carry around with us the eternal weight of glory, because we've been created by a heavenly, powerful King. And so I say to you, if it matters now how we live, then just imagine the glory that he invites you to know that can begin today, that this resurrection he desires to be for you---for you. So therefore, my friends, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the gospel, in the work of the King of glory, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. Our walking with him by the Spirit is not in vain.

So I say to you, Christian, if you have questions, if you are part of this congregation, ask me, ask Pastor Tim, ask one of your elders. If you're not a believer and you have further questions---what I've said perhaps has confused you, perhaps it's offended you---whatever it might be, I'll take either. Talk with me, talk with Pastor Tim. We would love to talk with you further about these eternal truths. For the weight of eternity hangs on them. I thank you for your patience.

Will you pray with me. Lord, our God, I stand before you as one who stands alone by the grace of the living God. Have mercy on us, oh Lord. We ask you, may you, by the power of your Spirit, lay upon us all the eternal weight of the glory of Christ and the power of his redemption, the victory of his resurrection. And that for all, oh Lord, who hear my voice, may you, by your Spirit, breathe new life into us to bring eternal life. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.